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ABSTRACT

This paper describes teacher attitudes and circumstances during and after Dayton City School's successful desegregation. Teachers were moved to integrated schools relatively early and easily. As a group, they did not become involved in the 1972-76 busing brouhaha that accompanied court-ordered desegregation. Fearing the destabilization of their students, teachers opposed programs that took children away from their buildings for the purpose of integrating science and humanities programs. Teachers criticized inservice programs designed to make them more sensitive to the needs of minority children; however, in principle, they supported desegregation. They also felt that they adequately met discipline problems that the social pressures of desegregation brought to the classroom. Most teachers felt that busing should include the outlying suburbs. The conclusion that Dayton's problems still exist despite a shrinking minority population has motivated administrators to talk about a system of magnet schools to make them more attractive to suburban students. The magnet schools will be set up to induce children in the suburbs to commute to the Dayton metropolitan area in the hope of encouraging further desegregation. It is not clear what pressures these new plans will bring to teachers. (JAM)

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What Happened to Teachers During the Desegregation of Dayton City Schools (1968-1976)?

Paper for 1989 AERA Convention
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Paul Dimond, one of the lawyers who worked for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in the suit that led to busing in Dayton, Ohio, says that courts can only ask if racial segregation is "an engine of caste discrimination or a matter of voluntary choice." They cannot, in his view, expand the opportunities for all people. Other institutions must do it.[1]

One of the institutions is the public school, and a group within that institution that is affected by the process of asking questions and seeking remedies is teachers. But it is not clear how they stand on this issue or even how they are affected by the resulting political controversies. The desegregation of Dayton City Schools gives us a chance to consider these questions because the teachers are still available and the controversy lasted a long time.

On September 2, 1976 the school doors opened and buses rolled in Dayton under Ohio's first court ordered plan to bring about desegregation.[2] The morning began with church people praying for peace.[3] Newspapers later quoted an elementary school teacher who was black as saying she finally got to teach a racially integrated classroom instead of only black children as she had for thirty-one years.[4]

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By most measures it was a startling success. On the first day estimated attendance was 80% and the rate quickly climbed to levels above the average for previous years. There were no reports of violence. During the next school board meeting on September 12, 1976, the only complaints were allegations of overcrowding at a school and concern over a lack of buses in one neighborhood. One story in the Dayton newspapers told of J. Stanley Pottinger, then chief of the U.S. Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, congratulating his former hometown by saying, "Dayton has one of the most successful large-city school desegregation plans in the country."[5]

The ease with which busing began belies the long and acrimonious controversy that led up to it. This debate seems to have focused around one superintendent, Wayne M. Carle, who was appointed in June, 1968 and was replaced in July, 1973. When he began his first three-year term, a newspaper story noted that his debut at the board meeting was marked by city youngsters demanding more Black history and a Black principal for Roosevelt High School and by a local Black minister who promised to renew his previous campaign for an end to school desegregation. The same story said Carl "took a greater part than his predecessor, and his soft-spoken comments promised to be a trademark of future board sessions."[6]

Carle seemed to take desegregation seriously. One of the assistant superintendents under Carle recalls extensive dialogues as to whether the superintendent's office should lead a campaign

for integration. They felt, if they waited, the courts would push them into it. But Carle would not wait for legal action. According to this assistant, Carle wanted to do something because it was the right thing to do.[7]

There is no doubt the schools were segregated. In 1973 a study published as "Political Strategies in Northern School Desegregation" by David Kirby and Robert L. Crain found Dayton schools among the most racially segregated in northern and western states.[8] This report was based on enrollment figures for 1971-72. At that time, of the 53,936 pupils, 42.7% were of minority groups. And out of ten high schools, three schools had greater than 96% minority enrollment and four schools had less than 6% minority enrollments. Fifteen elementary schools out of 57 had greater than 99% minority enrollment.

Furthermore, in 1969, the then U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare had investigated segregation in Dayton City Schools. They demanded that by 1971 the staff be integrated.[9] The staff was desegregated in several ways. First, voluntary transfers were sought. But by December, 1970, the district needed 594 more transfers. Only seventy-five of the necessary transfers had taken place.[10] Another way the staff was desegregated was to open five middle schools, partly as an experiment. These changed the K-8 organization that had been used in those schools and was still used in a majority of Dayton schools. Though this left several teachers untouched, it undoubtedly reduced the need for some teachers to move simply to improve the racial balance of the faculty. Third, the administration offered inducements such as special preparation

for those who would volunteer, permission to go in groups to another school and release time to visit the new school.

How did the teachers react to these shifts? The associate director of personnel said his office worked closely with the Dayton Classroom Teachers Association ensuring that the least disturbing methods be used. He added that only 80 or 90 teachers were forced to move and only about 20 teachers, out of the 650 or so that were transferred, asked to return to their former school after one year. The then president of the DCTA agreed with him.[11] Some teachers felt the changes were imposed on them.[12] But everyone agreed the teachers worked as best they could with what they had.

The attitude of teachers is shown in a newspaper story that appeared in June, 1972. Dennis Polite interviewed several middle school teachers as they were cleaning their desks for the summer after the first year of operation. He said most teachers agreed the middle schools are successful although some minor problems, such as the need for additional equipment still remained. Despite the teachers' views that middle schools were sound, Polite found that conservative School Board members still felt this curricular pattern encouraged the spread of vice and did not promote learning as did having the grades K-8 in the same building.[13]

Nonetheless, it is fair to say that the faculty of the Dayton schools was desegregated relatively early and easily in Carle's tenure. The desegregation of the pupils turned out to be impossible for him to manage. From December, 1969 until January,

1972, Wayne Carle worked with and for a school board that was divided into a pro-desegregation or liberal group and an anti-desegregation or conservative group. The alignment had the liberals in the majority with four votes to three. On July 14, 1971, a newspaper story appeared in the Dayton Daily News that spoke of a study conducted by Willard Fox of the Ohio School Boards Association and Roald Campbell of The Ohio State University. They found that the split defied cure and held that during the then upcoming November election voters should make their preferences known to form a board where "bickering, rancor, and personal animosities did not prevail."[14]

This fighting that took place amongst the members of this divided board seemed to result in considerable publicity about problems in the schools and subsequent defeat of school bond levies. The conservatives were members of a group that called themselves Serving Our Schools, founded in 1969, according to an analysis by Brian Usher, in reaction to a long standing tradition of paternalism in city politics. According to Usher's view, businessmen reformers followed John Patterson's ideal of running Dayton like a modern corporation. Patterson was a local businessman who, after 1913, urged that the role of politics be reduced. After him, a small group of prestigious citizens selected candidates for city office and the school board. These usually ran against little or no opposition. Usher said the aim of the SOS organization was to bring democracy back to elections.[15]

The SOS members seemed to express frustration or disapproval more than a consistent program. In May, 1973 the Public Opinion

Center for the Community Communications Project released a report that noted, "One of the most striking features of SOS respondents is the negative reaction which they showed toward so many topics regarding education."[16] At any rate, from December, 1969 until November, 1971 the voters defeated bond levies at least three times. And the SOS members of the school board did not support those levies no matter how the superintendent tried to demonstrate their need.[17]

In November, 1971 a 13.6 mill board levy passed. Unfortunately for Carle, William Goodwin, then president of SOS, was elected to the school board turning the four to three split amongst the members to the advantage of the conservatives. A newspaper of the day accused the liberals of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.[18] As a group, liberals polled 62.3% of the vote. But they divided those votes among four candidates while only three conservatives ran for three vacant seats. The fourth liberal candidate was a spoiler.

Carle and the liberal majority on the school board tried to act before the new members took office. On September 2, 1971, then president of the board, Leo Lucas, charged a Citizens' Advisory Committee to suggest ways to equalize "the educational opportunities for the poor and black students [that] now exist in the Dayton School District." He added committee members were not being asked to be architects for busing.[19] On December 8, 1971 the board adopted a resolution "Seeking Joint Action to End Segregation in Education, Housing and Employment in the Metropolitan Dayton Area." Included here was an admission of guilt by the board to reinforce

segregation in housing and education and employment by the way it assigned teachers and pupils and chose sites to build schools, a request for the state of Ohio to set up a plan and to force several surrounding school districts to be a part of desegregation in the metropolitan area, and a request to the superintendent to desegregate the Dayton Schools making each building representative of the district as a whole. The then president of the Dayton Classroom Teachers Association, Kurt Olt, stated that "his organization had by official action endorsed the concept of quality integrated education and urged the adoption of a plan of implementation to accomplish this goal."[20]

One of the first things the board dominated by conservatives did when it took office on January 3, 1972 was to rescind those resolutions calling for busing. They offered instead a freedom of enrollment plan and an offer to pay tuition to any students willing to go to another district if that transfer enhanced racial balance.[21] These became the main points of the conservative plan for desegregation. Later, magnet schools, science centers and arts programs were added to bring about mixing of the pupils on a voluntary basis.

School board meetings became extremely controversial. One local paper called the March 3, 1972 meeting "more like 'Hellzapoppin.'" The report said during the three hour session the board was castigated by citizens opposing Wayne Carle and by those supporting him.[22] As many as 600 to 1,000 people attended these sessions and packets would march outside. But by September, 1972 the controversy calmed down.[23]

The teachers seemed to take a dim view of these goings-on. The president of the DCTA complained to the board on April 26, 1973 that liberals and conservatives were fighting for their own desires. He said neither was thinking about the child or the needs of the teacher who was the one who would make desegregation work.[24]

The legal battle began on April 17, 1972. It went through several appeals and reversals. On March 23, 1976 Judge Carl Rubin ordered schools to integrate systemwide. Though Rubin reversed himself in 1977, busing remained as appeals continued until the U.S. Supreme Court on July 7, 1979 affirmed an earlier appeals court decision that systemwide busing was needed. During this process one outstanding violent event occurred that may illustrate the tensions of the time. On September 19, 1975 Charles Glatt, a 46-year-old desegregation expert was shot to death as he worked in his office in Dayton by a lone gunman. It was the only major act of violence to accompany desegregation.

When I interviewed twelve teachers, I found in my small sample only teachers who supported the liberal position or who were generally apolitical. As a group they did not become involved in the questions of desegregation. In fact, one person said a teacher should not use his or her position to take a stand on political issues.

My sample included eight black women, four white women, and four white men. All but four taught in elementary schools. I found most teachers to be isolated from their colleagues or close to a small group of friends. The teachers I spoke to rarely

participated with their colleagues in political campaigns to elect school board members they favored. Some worked individually to campaign for liberal candidates. One teacher spoke of a group of liberally oriented faculty in an experimental educational program based on team teaching who campaigned for a liberal candidate for the school board.

In general, the teachers resisted programs that took children away from their buildings. Thus, they tended to disapprove of science or humanities programs that took the children a few times per year to mingle in a building with children of other races. Interestingly, few music teachers disparged events such as gospel choirs that were set up on a district basis. This is surprising because a former supervisor of music waxed enthusiastic over these productions and the opportunities they offered.

The teachers also criticized inservice programs designed to make them more sensitive to the needs of minority children. As a group they supported desegregation. However, a white teacher in a black school complained busing only brought in a different type of black child to his school which led to fighting. He felt the busing was not done properly. Other teachers, though, said it increased the opportunities for all children.

Most teachers felt discipline problems in the classrooms were important before 1976. But several teachers noted they were in schools or programs that ran smoothly. Those who had trouble called 1972-1976 "the war years." In explaining a disruption, one

teacher said social problems came into the classroom. Other teachers blamed building principals for not keeping order. One teacher said the teachers in her building banded together and tried many things such as longer classes or shorter classes or holding what they called rap sessions to maintain order and work out hurt feelings. But, in general, the teachers felt they met the challenges the unusual pressures brought to the classroom. Most teachers look back on that time as having been one of hard but important work.

The teachers split on the question whether busing caused white flight. Some said it did. They knew of families who left while the controversy was going on. Others said busing had no effect. They said the number of jobs available declined as major factories such as National Cash Register and Frigidaire moved production facilities out of town.

In general, the teachers tried to do the best job they could in their classrooms. Reading teachers taught children to read. Music teachers taught them to play in bands. And science teachers made sure the children learned chemistry. The controversies surrounding desegregation did not seem to diminish their desire to work and, for many, made their need to teach even stronger.

When I asked the teachers if the example of their superintendent, Wayne Carle, fighting the board of education encouraged insubordination in their ranks, they often seemed puzzled I would even think such a thought. Either those

arguments were far away from them or the teachers did not see them as questions of obedience. Some middle level administrators did note that politics played a role in their jobs. This was especially the case after John B. Maxwell took over as superintendent in 1973, they said.

Most of the teachers felt busing should have included the outlying suburbs. They also recognized people in those other towns do not want to come into the city. And the former president of the DCTA noted that only a third of the teachers in Dayton City Schools in 1972 as now in 1988 lived or live in the city.

The problems of Dayton persist. Douglas Massey of the University of Chicago, ranked it as the third most segregated city of 59 metropolitan areas he studied using 1980 census information.[26] The enrollment of the public schools has declined from the 53,946 with 42.7% minority enrollment we noted in 1971 to 29,978 in 1985-86 with 60.2% minority enrollment.[27] In 1988, the school administrators began talking of turning to a system of magnet schools to make them more attractive and to reduce the students' feelings of being compelled to attend a particular school. It is not clear what pressures these new plans will bring to teachers. Nor is it clear if magnet schools of high quality will induce children in outlying suburbs to commute to Dayton thereby bringing about metropolitan desegregation.

Footnotes

1. Paul R. Dimond, Beyond Busing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1988), p. 399.
2. Larry Kineer, "Dayton School Buses Roll," Dayton Daily News September 2, 1976.
3. "Begins with Ecumenical Prayer for Peace" Journal Herald September 2, 1976.
4. Steve Sidlo, "Interview with Pearl A. Dale," Dayton Daily News September, 1976.
5. Steve Adams, "Success: Civil Rights Chief Glad His Hometown's Desegregation Plan Came Off So Well," Journal Herald, September 14, 1976.
6. Jim Lashley, "Carle's Debut on Board Spent in Hearing Demands." Dayton Daily News, June 14, 1968.
7. "Interview with Joe Rogus" December 28, 1988, unpublished.
8. Jay Smith, "Segregation Rate High in Dayton," Dayton Daily News, November 23, 1973.
9. Dimond, Beyond Busing, p. 124.
10. Dennis Polite, "School Board Meeting Devoted to Integration," Dayton Daily News, December 17, 1970.
11. Interview with Paul Ressler, October 4, 1988, unpublished and interview with Keith Haws, August 30, 1988, unpublished.
12. Interview with Michael Mangan and Marianna Hunt, October 27, 1988, unpublished.
13. Dennis Polite, "It's Workable," Dayton Daily News, June 1, 1972.
14. "School Board Split Defies Cure," Dayton Daily News, July 14, 1971.

15. Brian Usher, "Grass Roots Resprouting," Journal Herald, June 5, 1971.

16. "SOS Backers Unhappiest On Schools," Dayton Daily News,

17. Paul Turk, "Truth Squad Trails SOS Candidates," Journal Herald, August 15, 1971.

18. Denise Goodman, Brian Usher, Paul Turk, "Why Bill Goodwin Won," Journal Herald, November 26, 1971.

19. The Board of Education of the City School District of Dayton, Ohio. Minutes, September 2, 1971, p. 300.

20. The Board of Education of the City School District of Dayton, Ohio, Minutes, December 8, 1971, pp. 416-421.

21. The Board of Education of the City School District of Dayton, Ohio, Minutes, January 3, 1972, pp. 15-23.

22. "School Board Meeting More Like 'Hellzapoppin'", Dayton Daily News, March 3, 1972.

23. Dennis Polite, "School Board Meets in Peace," Dayton Daily News, September 15, 1972.

24. The Board of Education of the City School District of Dayton, Ohio, Minutes, April 26, 1973, pp. 159-160.

25. Doug McInnis, "School Planner's Death Recalled," Dayton Daily News, September 19, 1985.

26. Thomas Scipio, "Dayton 3rd Most Segregated in Study," Dayton Daily News, November 24, 1988.

27. A Call for Excellence: 1985-86 Annual Report, Dayton Public Schools, p. 6.